

With respect to the prior art patents, Applicant notes that the Steinke patent shows a body which is hingedly connected to the vehicle bodywork so as to pivot thereabout when the air bag is inflated. The bottom end of the body is connected to a mounting bracket by a tear line. As was stated in column 2, lines 31 - 34 of the Steinke patent:

At the junction of the extension shelf 24 with the bottom edge 20 outer door is a weakened portion forming a tear line 28 which can be most clearly seen in FIG. 4.

When the pressure of the air bag 56 is great enough, the door will separate from the extension shelf 22 by tearing along the tear line. As such, the Steinke patent exhibits the same problems of the prior art that the present invention is intended to overcome.

With respect to the amended independent claims, it is noted that the Steinke patent does not have the "flap of flexible material" secured to the bodywork. The Steinke patent lacks the complementary strips of hook-and-loop material.

Fundamentally, in the operation of the Steinke patent, when the air bag is inflated, the door and its extension shelf are torn. As such, replacement is required whenever the air bag is inflated. Furthermore, complex forming processes are required so as to create the tear line which will separate under the action of a desired force exhibited by the inflating of the air bag. Complicated hinging mechanisms must also be formed in the construction of the Steinke patent. The Steinke patent lacks the simplicity and structure of the present invention.

The Hagen patent shows a complicated mechanism whereby the body has female members adjacent to the edges which are secured onto yieldably deformable material fasteners. The panel will release upon the inflation of the air bag. A strap is connected to the vehicle bodywork so as to retain the panel after it is released from the vehicle bodywork. Applicant agrees with the Examiner that the

Hagen patent does show the two layers of material which are used for the formation of the body of the present invention. Applicant respectfully disagrees with the Examiner that the structure of the Hagen patent, individually or in combination with the Steinke patent, shows the structure of the present invention or carries out the function of the present invention.

The Ward patent shows an air bag cover retainer. The Ward patent was cited as showing the use of the complementary strips of hook-and-loop material. In the Ward patent, it is important to note that the strips of hook-and-loop material are secured directly to the air bag and are not secured to the vehicle bodywork. The apparatus of the Ward patent operates by breaking away from the vehicle bodywork when the air bag is inflated. The panel is secured directly to the air bag so that the panel is retained in a desired position when the air bag inflates. Although Applicant agrees that the Ward patent does show strips of hook-and-loop material, these strips of hook-and-loop material are used in an entirely different manner than in the present invention. Structurally, Applicant has amended the independent claims so as to indicate these strips of hook-and-loop material are affixed directly to the vehicle bodywork and not to the air bag.

Applicant respectfully contends that the combination of the Steinke, Hagen and Ward patents does not show the elements of the present invention, as now amended. First, none of these prior art patents shows the "flap of flexible material" which is permanently secured to the vehicle bodywork. None of these prior art patents show the function of the present invention in which the body is hingedly released from the vehicle bodywork when the air bag is inflated. The combination of the Steinke, Hagen and Ward patents would still require the tearing of the body when the air bag is inflated. The combination of the prior art patents would still lack the use of the strips of hook-and-loop material which are secured to the body and secured directly to the vehicle bodywork.

Applicant respectfully contends that it is very difficult to see how each of these prior art patents can be combined together, in any way, so as to show the structure of the present invention. If the air bag of the Steinke patent had the hook-and-loop material strips of the Ward patent, then the Steinke patent would not work in a proper manner.

Each of the prior art patents describes devices which are rather difficult and costly to manufacture. The present invention overcomes this problem by providing the body with a layer for shaping and rigidification of the body and a layer suitable for securing to the vehicle bodywork. A flap of flexible material is formed at the edge of the body so as to be secured to the vehicle bodywork and operate in a manner similar to that of a hinge. As such, the present invention has a retaining means and a fixing means which simply allow the air bag cover to be secured over the air bag. The cover of the present invention can be manufactured in a single step, such as in an injection molding machine, whereby the cover can be formed with its flap of flexible material and with its desired configuration. It is only necessary to secure the strips of hook-and-loop material to the vehicle bodywork and to a surface of the cover. The prior art, in combination, fails to achieve these advantages of the present invention.

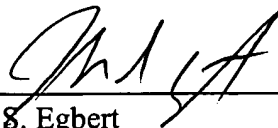
Applicant has amended the dependent claims herein so as to more clearly describe the present invention. The specification has been amended so that the language in the specification will reflect the language of the amended claims. Certain unclear terminology has been corrected in the amended claims and in the specification.

Based upon the foregoing analysis, Applicant contends that independent Claims 11 and 14 are now in a proper condition for allowance. Additionally, those claims which are dependent upon these independent claims should similarly be in condition for allowance. Reconsideration of the

rejections is requested and allowance of the claims at an early date is earnestly solicited. Since no new claims have been added above those originally paid for, no additional fee is required.

Respectfully submitted,

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